

The Life and Works of Ernest Hemingway

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“Man is not made for defeat.” This is one of many quotations of the author Ernest Hemingway that reflects not only his personal outlooks on life, but many facets of his works of novels and short stories. A writer of controversy to this day, Hemingway has become somewhat of a legend for his literary stature and prose. With a rather distinctive writing style, heavily influenced by his experiences in war and a life marked by misfortune, the author earned a significant number of awards in his lifetime for his works. His writings have consequently managed to overcome the ravages of time.

Born and raised in Oak Park, Illinois, Hemingway began writing in his teens. Prompted by prior experiences in high school newspapers and publications, after his graduation, he began a junior reporter position for the Kansas City Star. Even at this time, in his journalism, “Hemingway demonstrated a proclivity for powerful yet utterly objective stories of violence, despair, and emotional unrest, concerns that dominated his fiction.” After returning from his service in World War I, his work was further influenced by his experiences as a Red Cross ambulance driver in Italy, as well as ill-fated relationships in family and romance. In 1921, Hemingway returned to Europe for the sake of a writing career, and soon launched his first publication in 1923: Three Stories and Ten Poems. His major successes came soon after this.

It was not until he published A Farewell to Arms in 1929, which was decidedly a success, that Hemingway became highly acclaimed as a writer. This book was one of the instances in which the author’s invention of the “code” hero first appears. Demonstrated

before in The Sun Also Rises and again in For Whom the Bell Tolls, the “code” hero is a very influential definition of character used in Hemingway’s style. It was more clearly defined after one of his short stories, “The Killers,” as a quality in one who “has learned that the only way to hold on to honor, to individuality, to, even, the human order. . . is to live by his code.” It is here that his concern for strength, rigidity, and personal loyalty becomes evident. Strongly emphasized in many of his works, this idea of the “code” hero became very prominent in many aspects of Hemingway’s writing.

Despite the immediate success of his works such as The Sun Also Rises and A Farewell to Arms, he received his first award, the Pulitzer Prize, for The Old Man and the Sea in 1953. It was in 1954 that he later claimed both the Nobel Prize for Literature and the Award of Merit from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Critiques of his publications over the years, however, have varied significantly. According to some, his fiction is “shallow and insensitive” as a result of “his narrow range of characters and his thematic focus on violence and machismo, as well as his terse, objective prose. . . .” Others, however, “claim that beneath the deceptively limited surface lies a complex and fully realized fictional world.” These are the reasons why Hemingway remains a writer of controversy.

The author ended his life abruptly in 1961 when he committed suicide—a tragic, yet not completely unpredictable end to a life of complexity and anxiety. One could consider the man’s means of ending his own life as contradictory to his aforementioned values of strength and self-loyalty. It is up to oneself alone to decide whether this has relevance or not in regards to the importance and truth of his works. Nonetheless, it may be observed that, regardless of all elements of his life and death, the works of Ernest

Hemingway live on as some of the most influential in modern American literature.

[From Carlos Baker, Ernest Hemingway; Camden Country Free Library, “Ernest Hemingway,” www.empirezine.com (Oct. 3, 2005); Ernest Hemingway, The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway; and Paul Reuben. “Chapter 7: Early Twentieth Century – Ernest Hemingway.” PAL Perspectives in American Literature – A Research and Reference Guide <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap7/hemingway.html> (Oct. 3, 2005).]